SUMMARY

The Department of Energy, Western Area Power Administration, Rocky Mountain Region (Western) is the lead federal agency for a proposed project to upgrade the electric transmission system in the Fort Collins, Colorado area. Platte River Power Authority (Platte River) is proposing to add additional power generation at its Rawhide Energy Station, and to rebuild and upgrade a portion of Western's existing 115kV H-frame wood pole transmission lines between the LaPorte Tap and the Richards Lake Tap in the City of Fort Collins. In addition, Platte River is stringing a second 230kV line on the existing double-circuit, single-column steel poles north of the city to the Rawhide Energy Station.

Platte River and Western have prepared an environmental assessment (EA) for the proposed project, in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and follows regulations promulgated by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) for implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA (40 CFR 1500-1508) and the Department of Energy NEPA Implementing Procedures found at 10 CFR 1021.

Western's existing transmission line within the northern part of the City of Fort Collins was constructed in the 1950s on 115kV H-frame wood poles. The proposed project includes rebuilding approximately 6 miles of Western's existing poles using new, double-circuit, single-column steel poles designed for 230kV operation. Construction activities would be performed within the 75- to 100-foot rights-of-way (ROWs) of the existing lines.

As part of the public scoping process, Platte River and Western conducted two public workshops on February 1,2001 and February 15, 2001. Potentially affected landowners adjacent to the existing transmission line ROWs were also notified of the public workshops. A draft EA was distributed on June 27, 2001 to the public and interested agencies for review and comment. The comment period ended July 17, 2001.

Alternatives considered in the EA include the No-Action Alternative, and the Proposed Action. Additional alternatives considered but eliminated from detailed analysis included conservation of energy alternatives, electric system alternatives, structure type alternatives, and design alternatives.

Under the No Action Alternative, the existing transmission lines in the Fort Collins area would not be upgraded or rebuilt, and only essential maintenance activities would be performed. Repairs would be required with increasing frequency in the future as the transmission lines increase in age. If the No Action Alternative were implemented, other actions would be required to improve the electric system that serves the Fort Collins area to provide reliable delivery of additional electric power. The other actions taken to improve the electrical system in the Fort Collins area would have environmental effects.

The Proposed Action consists of the following: 1) Platte River would string a second 230kV circuit on Platte River's existing double-circuit, single-column steel poles between the Rawhide Energy Station and the LaPorte Substation, 2) Platte River would convert one side of it's existing double-circuit line from the LaPorte Substation to the LaPorte Tap line to 230kV operation, 3)

Platte River proposes to rebuild and upgrade a 2-mile section of Western's existing Flatiron-Poudre 115kV H-frame wood pole transmission line between the LaPorte Tap and Western's Poudre Substation to a double circuit transmission line with single-column steel poles. One circuit (Western's) would be constructed for 115kV operation and terminate at the Poudre Substation. The second circuit (Platte River's) would be designed and constructed for 230kV operation and would be connected at the LaPorte Tap, 4) Platte River would construct a second circuit on its existing double-circuit line between the Timberline and the Poudre Substations and terminate the new 230kV line at the Timberline Substation, 5) Platte River would rebuild and upgrade Western's existing 115kV H-frame wood pole transmission line between Western's Poudre Substation and Platte River's Richards Lake Substation as a double-circuit line using single-column steel poles designed for 230kV operation, but initially operated at 115kV.

Environmental resources were identified and evaluated for project-related impacts in the EA. The environmental consequences of the Proposed Action are summarized as follows:

- **Climate and Air Quality** -There will be no long-term effects of regional or local climate. There may be minor, local, temporary, short-term adverse effects to air quality due to generation of fugitive dust and vehicle emissions from project-related construction activities. Employing Standard Construction Practices will minimize fugitive dust and vehicle emissions.

- **Physiography, Topography, Geology** - There will be no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects on physiography, topography, or geology.

- **Soils** - There will be minor soil disturbance and compaction, and possible soil loss due to wind and water erosion in areas of pole replacement and localized areas. Effects on soils would be local, temporary, and short-term. The soils in the project area have been previously disturbed by installation of the existing transmission lines without significant adverse effects. There will be no significant adverse effects to soils, or prime and important farmlands.

- **Water Resources - Surface Water, Floodplains, Wetlands, Riparian Areas, and Groundwater** - There will be no effects to water occurrence, flow, surface water channels, or stock ponds. Minor, localized, short-term adverse effects to surface water quality may occur due to sedimentation during construction activities. A Floodplain/Wetlands Assessment is included in the EA. There will be no adverse effects to floodplains, wetlands, or riparian areas because the transmission lines will span these areas. There will be no effects to groundwater resources.

- **Vegetation** - Temporary, short-term effects to vegetation will occur within the existing ROW between the LaPorte Tap and the Richards Lake Tap due to the loss of cover and biomass as vegetation is disturbed at pull-sites, equipment staging areas, and pole replacement sites. Potential invasion of weedy plants, and displacemnt of native plants, may occur due to soil disturbances within the existing ROW. Larimer County recommended practices for weed control and Standard Construction Practices will be used to minimize effects to vegetation. Because no ground disturbances are planned within wetlands or riparian areas, the project will have no effects on wetlands or riparian areas. In the Springer Natural Area within the City of Fort Collins, all individuals of a rare plant, the American black currant shrub, will be

marked and avoided. There will be no effect on any plant species of concern.

- **Wildlife** - There will be temporary, short-term, localized effects to wildlife and wildlife habitat from construction activities. No data indicate that the existing transmission lines have caused collision or electrocution of birds in the project area. The Proposed Action will not change the potential for avian collisions or electrocutions compared with the existing transmission lines. There is no potential for direct effects to fish habitats or populations. Implementation of Standard Construction Practices will eliminate the potential for indirect effects to fish habitats or populations.

- **Special Status Vegetation and Wildlife** - The EA includes a Biological Assessment that addresses seven federally listed, proposed, and candidate species of plants and animals potentially occurring within the project area. The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred on September 12, 2001 with Western's determination that the project will have "no effect" on the black-footed ferret, black-tailed prairie dog, Ute ladies'-tresses orchid, and the Colorado butterfly plant. The project may affect, but is "not likely to adversely affect" the bald eagle, mountain plover, and Preble's meadow jumping mouse.

- **Land Ownership, Zoning, and Land Use** -There will be no change in land ownership, zoning, or land use as a result of the project. There will be no long-term adverse effects to cropland. Temporary, short-term, effects to residential land uses will occur during to construction activities within the ROWs of the existing transmission lines due to increases in noise, dust, traffic and roadways, and the intrusion of construction equipment and crews onto private properties.

- **Visual Resources** - There will be minor visual effects due to replacement of the existing H-frame wood poles with taller, single-column, steel poles for the 6-mile segment between the La Porte Tap and Richards Lake Tap. Effects to visual resources from construction of the project will not be significantly different from those associated with the existing transmission lines.

- **Socioeconomics** - There will be no significant effects to socioeconomic resources of Larimer County. There will be no permanent increase in population or workforce, employment or income, housing or community service demands. Minimal additional tax revenues will be generated by the project.

- **Electrical Characteristics and Public Safety** - There will not be significant corona effects, ozone generation, radio and television interference, or audible noise associated with the upgraded transmission lines. The electric and magnetic fields associated with the Proposed Action are not anticipated to cause adverse health or biological effects. The Proposed Action will meet or exceed the applicable requirements of the National Electrical Safety Code.

- **Cultural Resources** - No significant or eligible cultural sites were identified within the ROWs of the existing transmission lines. At least six significant cultural resources were recorded within 500 feet of the centerline of the ROWs of the existing transmission lines. Direct effects to cultural resources will be avoided, and indirect effects will be minimized, by

requiring that all construction activities take place within the existing ROWs. On July 25, 2001, the Colorado State Historic Preservation Officer concurred with Western's determination that "no historic properties will be affected".